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Leadership Competency Series

8th Habit – Tidings of Winning Leaders

Vision, discipline, passion and conscience are the four capabilities for leading a powerful life. With persistent effort leaders expand these intelligences to express their discovered voice- the 8th habit of leadership, says M R Chandramowly

CEO: After discovering the inner voice, one needs to express it. In the 8th habit, Covey unveils the secret of leadership as 'expanding the four native human intelligences - vision, discipline, passion and conscience'. Would you make this more graspable?

Guru: It is clear over there. Vision is mental intelligence. It is the ability to see with the mind's eye, what is possible in people, projects, in causes and in organizations. Discipline is putting effort to bring that vision into reality. Discipline arises, when vision joins with commitment. Passion is the fire, the desire that sustains the discipline to achieve vision. Conscience is the inward moral sense of what is right and what is wrong. It is a guiding force to vision, discipline and passion.

The best leaders operate in four dimensions. They anticipate future with long-term perspective (vision). Are realistic and focused. They are tenacious, decisive and take initiative in execution (discipline). They are optimistic, hopeful, fun loving and people oriented (passion). They are enthusiastic, ethical, and fair and take responsibility (Conscience) with humility.

CEO: Yes. Vision, Discipline and Passion rule the world. Covey cites George Washington's vision of building a new nation, Florence Nightingale's vision and passion to improve quality of nursing in military hospitals and Gandhi's moral authority and universal consciousness which freed India.

Guru: Yes. Some times a leader's vision may look good to him but not for the world. "Once I really am in power, my first and foremost task will be the annihilation of the Jews" - this was the vision of Adolph Hitler. Vision is the beginning process of reinvention for oneself or the organisation. The vision for your organization is the sum of your desire, hopes, dreams goals and plans. Einstein said, " Imagination is more important than knowledge". If you live your vision, it is in your voice, in your energy and in whatever you display. If not so, the vision is just a dead line of printed letters framed on your corporate wall. Leadership is about translating vision into reality. You need discipline to execute vision.

CEO: But some times I see people equate discipline with absence of freedom…

Guru: No, the opposite is true. Discipline is defining the reality and living by it. When you do what you want to do, that is freedom. So, only the disciplined are truly free and the undisciplined are slaves of moods, appetites and passions. Discipline is the trait common to all successful people. Discipline gets consistency by commitment and passion.

CEO : What do you think one must do to create passion in life?

Guru: The key to create passion is to find the unique talents that one has, decide their role and purpose in the world and determine what work they want to do. One of the career building principles is to understand the difference between skill and talent. Talent is an unusual innate ability in some activity. Skill is an ability that is acquired by training. Skills are not talents but talent requires skills. A sales manager may have skills and knowledge in sales but not talent. His organization will never tap into his passion or voice. His job needs monitoring and supervision. If an organization hires people whose passion and interests are with the job, they won't require any supervision at all, since their fire comes from within and not from outside. You must know, those who do a fine job of their function never like to be managed or supervised.

CEO: I can now clearly see the integration of vision, discipline and passion. The fourth one, conscience is the fulcrum, which drives the trio. In organizations we know who are honest and keep their promises and commitments. We also know the deceitful, duplicitous and dishonest. We see the cause and effect principle, day in and day out when we read about exposure of corrupt people or cheating or fraud in sports or public organisations.

Covey writes that the value of both ends and means are inseparable, that ends actually pre-exist in the means. He cites Gandhi's teachings of the seven deadly sins - Wealth without work, Pleasure without conscience, Knowledge without character, Commerce without morality, Science without humanity, Worship without sacrifice and Politics without principles. Isn't it interesting how each one of these admirable ends can be falsely attained?

Guru: Precisely. What has happened to some of the inheritors of royal wealth today? Their money is spent on horses and hospitals. Recall the end state of some of the people who indulged in pleasure without conscience. They died suffering. Knowledge of precision printing or banking is fine but when it is used without character we saw the stamp paper scandals and the great Indian scams. It is true with some of the powerful American firms, which went up in smoke, when they set aside integrity and ethics from business.

The successful leaders are those who operate in the four dimensions: Vision, Discipline, Passion and Conscience. You can look at any successful person irrespective of the field of activity and their influence is great when they have these four traits.

CEO: Absolutely. When we say Leaders, they are not just the CEOs or Directors. They are in all domains of life. They are in social organizations, arts, education, sports or movies. Why, there was this Muthuraj, a young boy working backstage on the theatre circuit way back in 1935. He dreamt of becoming a great actor but wallowed in poverty and missed school education. His discipline and passion for arts took him to greater heights of reverence mostly because of his humility and simplicity. He won all the laurels that few great actors could win. A boy who did not go beyond fourth form was felicitated with a university doctorate.

His achievements became the theme of a doctoral research. Keeping aside the flashes of the film world, this man became the darling of Karnataka and he stood up for the protection and promotion of art and culture. A firm vision, high degree of discipline in physical and mental domains, caring passion for the culture and people of his state and his actions guided by conscience raised him to towering heights. Dr. Raj was a manifestation of four intelligences: Vision, Discipline, Passion and Conscience.

Guru: Yes. The Eastern wisdom adeptly encapsulates this phenomenon.

"Life is an art and how can it be taught?
skills and techniques help only the smart
success in leadership is mirage and distant
if one fails to discover ones own talent"

(Dr. D.V.G's Mankuthimmana Kagga – 740)

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